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MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE BILINGUAL CHILD

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Meeting the Needs of the Bilingual Child

A Historical Perspective of the Nation's First Transitional Bilingual Education Law: Chapter 71A of the Acts of 1971 Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Introduction

Bilingual education is not an objective in itself, but part of a much larger goal:

> **. . . encouraging a child of limited English-speaking ability to develop fully his individual skills and talents. It is the use of the child's native language and respect for his cultural background that best distinguished bilingual education from programs more narrowly focused such as ESL [English as a Second Language] and remedial reading.**

This excerpt from a United States Senate report (S. 1539) on educational amendments of 1974 stresses the need for more and better bilingual education. The report describes the importance of strengthening the federal bilingual program (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) and recommends a significant increase in funding through 1978. Title VII was initiated by Congress in 1967 to facilitate more effective educational programs for children of non-English or limited English-speaking ability. It has done much to stimulate initiatives in several states—and Massachusetts is no exception.

In fact, Massachusetts was the first state to mandate a Transitional Bilingual Education Law. Enacted in 1971, the law focuses on six linguistic

minorities: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Greek, and Chinese. Under the measure:

- **every district with twenty or more children of limited English-speaking ability of one language group must provide a bilingual program;**
- **parents, teachers, and community people are involved at each level of the decision-making process;**
- **rigid teacher certification requirements, the reduction of teacher-pupil ratios, and other requisites enable schools to provide quality programs; and**
- **cities and towns are assisted in the implementation of the law through liberal reimbursement for additional costs and through technical assistance from the State Department of Education.**

The law is working in Massachusetts because of the above features and because of the citizen participation in getting it passed and implemented. Both ingredients are models to replicate within as well as out of the state.

Indeed, the initial success of the law has led to numerous inquiries from state officials, ranging from the basic question, "Why is there a need for bilingual education?" to "How did Massachusetts pass legislation in a problem area usually associated with other states?"

Legislators, students, citizen groups, and linguistic minority advocates have asked for information on the passage and implementation of the Massachusetts law. This booklet is designed for those interested in an overview of the past five years of progress in bilingual education in Massachusetts. More scholarly papers are being prepared, and the Massachusetts State Department of Education has developed a series of basic documents available for those who would like to probe the subject in much greater detail.

The Need

We are, as John F. Kennedy's last book was entitled, *A Nation of Immigrants.* The nation has changed, but the inner needs of the immigrants remain the same. They need to have hope for a better life, materially and spiritually, in an environment that challenges, not coddles; encourages, not denies; shapes, but not casts; and builds on strengths rather than weaknesses. Most of all, the new immigrant needs the recognition of himself as a person, a requirement which society can meet only through respect for that person's heritage, his native language, and his way of life. The minority member need not adopt the greater society, but he must adapt to it to survive and contribute. This is why a bilingual policy makes sense.

Second and third generation ethnic groups ask, "We and our fathers managed without any special assistance. Why can't the new immigrants do the same?" That times have changed is a reason in itself. To revive the statistics on the masses who survived the treatment of past, less sensitive immigration policies and the industrial revolution would only bring the response: "Thank goodness times have changed." Although the present situation for immigrants is much different, their motivations remain the same. It takes a very special person to migrate. The decision to move from the familiar to the unknown requires the courage

of an astronaut, the optimism of a gambler, and the belief in oneself that easily equates with history's great achievers.

In what ways are conditions today different from those faced by previous generations of immigrants? The most significant change is communication, especially inexpensive air travel. Although immigrants in former times dreamed of returning to their native villages, they probably never did. Today, for a few weeks' pay, one can return in a day's time to any point in the western world.

Along with technical change, our society and our schools have changed. Seventy years ago, there was no school system except schools for the elite. Today we have a national school system which is striving for equality of opportunity. The opportunity to attend twelve years of school, which was denied to immigrants in the past, is guaranteed to the children of today's immigrants — if they speak English. Until bilingual education came along, the majority of non-English speakers were doomed to drop out of school. An individual in his grandfather's day could make a fairly comfortable living in the ghetto without an education. Today a person can barely survive in our complex society without an education.

The Immigration Acts of 1965, opening the door to many southern Europeans, reflected a new concern for immigrants and accounted for the current increase in immigration of many non-English-speaking people to the United States.

Finally, the newcomer to our cities today is often not a foreigner with a passport, but an American from Puerto Rico, the Southwest, or the South, who comes to our northern cities with the same hopes, aspirations, and problems of his immigrant kin.

The problem, therefore, has been mainly an urban one. Large cities could not readily respond to yet another serious problem without state and federal help. Many states responded to the civil rights demands of the 1960s, initiated by blacks, by mandating ethnic studies in the curricula. Yet only a few states are conducting bilingual programs. Massachusetts is the first to have enacted a Transitional Bilingual Education Law for its non-English and limited English-speaking children.

Why Massachusetts?

Several factors account for the development of ethnic programs in the Commonwealth. The Spanish-speaking population in Massachusetts is considerably smaller than that in places such as California, Texas, and New York City. Alex Rodriguez, chairman of the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Bilingual Education, suggests that because the "problem" was so small and manageable in Massachusetts, the state was able to move faster in this direction than other parts of the country.

Secondly, the literature of the 1960s indicates that the intellectual community was aware of the emerging situation, especially in Boston where minority needs were most critical. A 1970 study of the Boston schools, *Organizing an Urban School System for Diversity,* called attention to the escalating number of Spanish-speaking people living in the city: in 1960 there were 2,500, and by 1970 there were 40,000. This report also noted the positive response of the Boston school system to the situation in its establishment of the Department of Bilingual Education in 1970. Another study, *The Way We Go to School: the Exclusion of Children in Boston,* by the Task Force on Children Out of School, reported that at least 5,000 Spanish-speaking children were being denied an education in our schools. These and other documents, coupled with academic, legisla-

tive, and community support, created an atmosphere of urgency to which the system had to respond.

Thirdly, while academic and political leaders were sympathetic and cooperative, there was no substitute for the hard work and political know-how demonstrated by the initiators of the Bartley-Daly bill, the bill that was to become the nation's first Transitional Bilingual Education Law.

Entitled "An Act Providing For the Establishment and Implementation of Special Courses of Bilingual Education," it was not the only bilingual bill submitted to the legislature. The first, sponsored by Maurice A. Donahue (then president of the Senate) and the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, was designed to improve vocational education for non-English-speaking people, thus increasing their opportunities for better jobs. The bill was not specifically what the community people wanted, and it did not receive their support. Although not passed, it provided a format and served as a catalyst for disparate ethnic groups to join forces.

Citizen participation was most effective in the efforts of a coalition of advocates for bilingual education. This citizen group assisted the legislature in drafting the new bill and lobbied with individual legislators. With the help of political leadership, the bill was passed unanimously. It combined political reality with a reasonable and workable system of bilingual education for the state of Massachusetts. To their credit, Governor Francis W. Sargent and Senate President Maurice Donahue, the sponsors of similar bills, acceded to Representative Michael J. Daly and House Speaker David M. Bartley, who co-sponsored the final bill. The process of passing this law was so successful that it has become a formula for legislative action.

Representative Daly, chairman of the House Committee on Education, has offered the following advice for getting legislation drafted and enacted based upon the process which emerged from the successful passage of the bilingual law. He has advocated use of this process for subsequent legislation.

•Gain the support of other legislative leaders and, if possible, of the Governor. Let them know what you're trying to do and keep them informed and involved.

•You can't build something in a vacuum. Bring the various special-interest groups, lay and professional, together. Enlist their support and involvement. Let them help draft and redraft the legislation. Now it's their bill. And

then show them how to influence other members of the legislature to help get it passed. If no special interest groups exist, create them.

- **Be sure to involve key people from the state education department from the beginning—not to influence or lobby, but to provide advice and counsel and to insure that those who are going to implement the new law know what it's all about well in advance of enactment.**

Robert J. Crabtree, "Breakthrough in Massachusetts: Getting It Together for the Handicapped," *Compact,* Vol. 7 No. 4, September—October 1973, p. 9.

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Writers of the Law

It is important to note the contribution of the writers who provided both the language and some of the legislative innovations. Robert J. Crabtree, research director for the Joint Committee on Education from 1969-1973, worked with a team of lawyers from Harvard, notably Stuart A. Abelson and Jeffrey W. Kobrick. Dr. Joseph M. Cronin, the state's first secretary of education, testified as a private citizen for the bill. Dr. Neil V. Sullivan, then commissioner of education, assigned a special task force to address the bilingual issue. He appointed Ernest J. Mazzone, then director of the Educational Professional Development Act (EPDA) bilingual teacher training project, to serve as Department of Education liaison on State Board and Department positions regarding the drafted legislation. Dr. Thomas J. Curtin, executive deputy commissioner of education, was involved in the entire process from its inception and worked quietly behind the scenes, explaining each facet to key legislators and educational leaders. Important establishment leadership came from the teachers themselves. The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) was a co-sponsor of the bill and supported it in such a way as to ensure complete support from the professional ranks.

In addition to citizen participation, legislative leadership, and institutional involvement, this

movement - like every movement - had key personalities who epitomized the spirit of the bill. Leaders emerged from each major city, but perhaps the most charismatic figure appeared in Boston - Sister Francis Georgia Vicente. She was working at the time with the Spanish-speaking community of Boston through the Mayor's Office of Public Service. It was her persistence, coupled with technical aid from the Educational Development Corporation, that helped the Boston School Department to develop "transitional bilingual clusters," prototypes of subsequent bilingual classes. Such individual leadership exemplified the bilingual effort and carried over into the implementation plan.

Why Transitional Bilingual Education?

Why was a Transitional Bilingual Education approach chosen instead of English as a Second Language on one end or maintenance bilingual education on the other?

Transitional Bilingual Education was selected by both community advocates and legal counsel because it seemed to be the best possible social, political, and pedagogical solution for Massachusetts at this stage. It meant, first, the establishment of the bilingual concept without replacing the ESL system since many of the positive aspects of the ESL program could be incorporated. It told reluctant parents that their children would be eased into the English mainstream without being penalized and isolated, as they had been previously. It told ethnic groups that their languages and cultures would be recognized and preserved while their children gained access to the opportunities within American society.

With the law's passage in 1971, Massachusetts began to bridge the educational gap for linguistic minorities while many states were, and still are, debating the pros and cons of English as a Second Language as opposed to Transitional Bilingual Education or maintenance bilingual education.

Implementation

Despite the legislation's remarkable support in Massachusetts, passing a law and implementing it to its legislative intent are two different things. How has Massachusetts implemented the Transitional Bilingual Education Law?

The movement's momentum was sustained chiefly because key people remained involved while making room for newcomers. Many social action programs of great promise sputter and die after legislation is passed because the people involved move on to other issues. Dr. Neil Sullivan, as commissioner of education, established the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Bilingual Education in 1971. Chaired by Alex Rodriguez, the council consisted of members of the citizen group, members of the State Department of Education, and leaders from cities and towns. This citizen/professional group helped draft regulations and maintained communication channels with the Department of Education. It also recommended Ernest Mazzone as a candidate for director of the Bureau of Transitional Bilingual Education, a newly-formed bureau in the Department of Education under the structural jurisdiction of the Division of Curriculum and Instruction. The State Board of Education approved the council's recommendation of Mazzone as the bureau's first director in 1972.

Only seven months after the bilingual bill had been signed, four cities proved themselves eligible for bilingual programs and received nearly half a million dollars. The bill called for $1.5 million to be reimbursed to cities and towns which conducted approved bilingual programs for costs over and above their per pupil expenditure. This fiscal innovation for financing new programs became a model for future legislation.

The Bureau of Transitional Bilingual Education itself received the complete support of the Board of Education through its recommendation for a full budget that was given top priority by both the Board and Governor Sargent in its first year. It spite of the help, however, the bureau was not fully staffed to provide complete technical assistance to local cities and towns until two years later.

Timing and hard work are essential in any movement; having a strong advocacy in the budgeting process is even more vital. Even though the bilingual bureau had legislative support, support from two commissioners of education (Drs. Neil Sullivan and Thomas Curtin), and citizen support from the bilingual coalition group, this alone was not sufficient to ensure funding for administration of the programs. It was critical in this first year of implementation, 1972, to have support in the fiscal apparatus of government in both the legislative and executive branches. For a law to be implemented successfully, people involved in the budgetary process must be interested in expediting it. Fortunately, bilingual education had fiscal support in the legislative branch from Speaker of the House David Bartley, one of the sponsors of the bill, and in the executive branch from Dr. Joseph Cronin, the newly inaugurated secretary of education, who declared implementation of the law one of his top priorities.

Thus, the two branches, executive and legislative, plus the active participation of citizens, guaranteed the state's responsibility in meeting its legislative mandate in record time.

What Next?

What is the future of bilingual education in Massachusetts? We have passed the crisis stage. Over fifty communities are involved. Massachusetts has implemented Transitional Bilingual Education and has already helped more than 15,000 children. With the grassroots involvement, the program is firmly anchored, but much more needs to be done to improve the quality of instruction, the training of teachers, and the involvement of parents before we can claim that the program has been successfully implemented.

Assuming that the basic groundwork has been laid, it is now possible to project the next step, which might well be called the maintenance phase. As children leave Transitional Bilingual Education classes able to compete in the mainstream, with an understanding of and pride in their parents' native language and culture, they will want to retain their proficiency. Clearly, we would be squandering their native heritage to their disadvantage and to that of our society were we to deny these children the voluntary chance to continue to study their mother tongue and culture as they pass through junior high and high school. The 1974 session of the legislature has deliberated on a language and cultural maintenance bill which would permit continuation of language and cultural classes for students who have completed bilingual programs in elementary and

junior high schools. Indeed, this option is now available for high-school students if twenty or more parents or students in a school district request such a program, under Chapter 215 of the Acts of 1972.

As more and more truly bilingual students leave high school, the postsecondary institutions will have to create more options for bilingual study, especially in Spanish, Portugese, French, and Italian. As more and more ethnic groups seek to study their roots and to learn languages associated with their own backgrounds, the bilingual program will have to expand to include other language groups in Massachusetts. Even those who only want to better understand their neighbors by studying the language and history of other groups will demand more services. Such programs have already been implemented through Title VII federal bilingual funds.

Bilingual education is the first step towards recognizing the need to maintain, rather than destroy, linguistic and cultural diversity in Massachusetts. The type of society that respects and builds on differences, within the context of the laws and rights of the majority, is a goal some have called a "cultural democracy." Such a goal has been deemed a worthy one for the state of Massachusetts.

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